

Quality Review Report

**Village Elementary School
4625 Werling Drive
Fort Wayne
Indiana
IN 46806**

**Principal: Donna Abbott
Dates of review: October 20 - 21, 2009
Reviewer: Denis Pittman**

Cambridge Education (LLC)



Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Background information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main findings

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school:

Village Elementary School has 400 students enrolled, from pre-kindergarten through to grade 5. Its diverse student body is comprised of 60 percent African American, 11 percent Asian, 11 percent Hispanic, 8 percent White, and 11 percent multiracial students. The proportion of students who qualify for free and reduced cost lunch is 78 percent, which is well above the State average. The student body includes 14 percent special education students and 17 percent English language learners, a significant increase over the previous year. Average daily attendance is 95.4 percent which is equivalent to the State average.

The proportion of students achieving ISTEP standards for math and English language arts in the testing grades 3-5 is significantly below State standards. Science standards in grade 5 are also well below average. The school failed to meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) in English language arts and math for its relevant categories. The school has recently accommodated Burmese refugee students, many of whom have had no previous formal education. These students constitute approximately 10 percent of the school population.

The principal is in her second year at the school.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well:

- The school provides a safe and orderly environment for learning where students readily comply with structured routines and the positive relationships between students and staff help promote the school values and good attendance.
- The new principal provides strong and effective leadership that provides a sense of purpose, direction, and staff confidence.
- The school analyzes data effectively analyzed to identify groups of students and individuals who are in need of intensive support.
- Professional development is carefully structured and delivered effectively to meet the needs of the staff.
- Communication within the school and externally to parents is open and relevant which helps to sustain a collaborative culture and commitment.

Areas for Improvement:

Responsibility of the school:

- Improve the monitoring and evaluation of school, staff and student performance to achieve greater consistency and raise standards by:
 - setting relevant and realistic long and short-term goals and plans derived from evaluation and the regular analysis of data;
 - reducing the number of instructional initiatives to prevent overload;
 - ensuring consistency in the quality of teaching and monitoring progress regularly;
 - ensuring that teachers make consistent use of data to differentiate instruction in all classes to meet the needs of each student.
- Raise faculty's expectations of student progress and achievement by:
 - maintaining a challenging and engaging core curriculum, exemplars of high-quality students' work and relevant rubrics to show standards;
 - formalizing the math and English language arts curriculum;
 - giving clearer indications in marking to show students how to improve;
 - providing opportunities for self-assessment and greater clarity in helping students understand and set academic goals.
- Improve the quality of the English as a second language program by:
 - acquiring or training suitably qualified staff, purchasing relevant resources and accessing external expertise and support;
 - providing coherent diagnostic assessments to establish benchmarks for students.
- Increase the engagement of parents in their children's education and in the life of the school by:
 - providing relevant workshops and activities for parents to enhance their understanding of the schools' work;
 - identifying and encouraging target groups of parents to be more involved in the life of the school.

Responsibility of the School Corporation:

- Provide a clear strategy and relevant support to raise standards that is based on an evaluation of the school's specific needs to:
 - direct resources and staffing to support the effective delivery of English as a second language;
 - support the school in attracting, appointing and retaining highly skilled staff;
 - utilize skills within the School Corporation to develop parental involvement and sustain curriculum planning in math and English language arts;
 - examine ways to increase the length of the school day;
 - reduce the number of curriculum initiatives, and match them to the school's identified needs, in order to give focus to instructional outcomes.

Responsibility of the Indiana Department of Education:

- Explore reducing the current three-year timescale for the formal evaluation of teaching staff.

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation: The school's overall performance

The overall performance of this school is fair.

The culture of the school is supportive of students' needs. Students enjoy coming to school as this is reflected in their high attendance levels. Clear and easily understood systems are in place to encourage students to behave well. The school details its expectations regarding behavior and attendance in handbooks and as notices in classrooms. Students relate well to adults and to each other. Most are keen to please and try hard for their teachers. Well resourced in some areas, the school provides a stimulating environment for learning. Classroom displays are colorful and bright. Insufficient use is made of rubrics to help students understand what high quality work looks like.

The general curriculum provides a broad range of stimulating learning experiences through its 'specials' art and music, and enrichment programs. Currently the school has not adequately formalized its core curriculum relating to language arts and math to ensure the continuity of student performance in these crucial areas of student learning. The English as a second language program lacks adequate resources to meet the specialized needs of its new cohort of Burmese students. The school encourages students to identify personal goals but not reinforce this in a consistent manner. It is responsive to the needs of economically disadvantaged families through the work of a home-school coordinator and guidance staff and provides advice and information about relevant support agencies. However, many parents do not support their children's education sufficiently and are not involved in the work of the school.

A trend of student underachievement in the core subjects has been evident for a number of years. Recent changes in the leadership of the school have resulted in a more rigorous culture of accountability. Staff members focus more on meeting the needs of students. The school uses a variety of instructional initiatives to address the low performance outcomes of students. It does not currently undertake a rationalization of these programs to achieve a greater consistency of practice. However, the introduction of mandatory blocks of time for focusing on the core subjects is a positive development. The systematic collection of data is an increasingly strong feature of the school's work. The school has established a coherent system for routinely tracking achievement through the creation of 'data walls' on the progress of students. However, students are generally not able to say with any degree of certainty what their achievement levels are such as in reading.

The new principal's vision for the school is increasingly reflected in a positive, practical reality for all students. She fully appreciates the challenges facing the school and is incrementally implementing action plans to promote change and secure improvement. A distributed leadership team monitors and evaluates teaching and learning, which, increasingly, is providing a clear picture of what works well and where improvements are required. The school has established some links with its community but the absence of an assistant principal means that this has not been a focused priority. The school corporation is not proactive enough in driving initiatives within the school. The funding and the allocation of resources to sustain the continuity of staffing, effective English as a second language program and curriculum developments are inadequate.

1: Readiness to Learn

This area of the school's work is fair.

1.1: Safety, Discipline, and Engagement

The school culture, environment and student engagement are fair.

Students behave well and most are keen to learn and follow the clear routines conscientiously. These procedures and consequences are practiced regularly in classrooms. The school systematically

displays the “ROAR” expectations of respect, being organized, accountable, and ready to learn around the school. Precise organizational procedures enable students to move around safely and quietly. The school instigates regular crisis drills to enable staff and students to deal with any unexpected events. Students confirm that they feel safe and secure in the school. The overall cleanliness and maintenance of the school is high and a variety of displays in the hallways celebrates students’ work. Currently there is insufficient use of rubrics to give students an understanding of what constitutes high quality work.

The school utilizes detailed pacing guides to promote instruction. However, coherence and continuity is lost, as the school does not have a formalized curriculum plan for math and English language arts. This process has also been constrained by the districts’ slow implementation of a core curriculum for all schools. The school has acted purposefully by increasing the blocks of time for teaching math, language arts and writing for all grades and providing more focused instruction for all classes. The school has successfully adopted a structured approach for the teaching of problem solving in math and computer technology that it uses well to facilitate independent learning. It uses cooperative learning during group situations extensively and productively. Currently there are limited opportunities for students to assess their own work or to influence their educational or personal targets.

1.2: Action against Adversity

The way the school directly address student’s poverty-driven deficits is fair.

The school has an understanding of the economic difficulties and challenges facing many families. It gains this information from staff with designated responsibilities such as the home school coordinator and guidance counselor. The former is extensively involved with home visits, accessing community resources and establishing links with social service agencies to provide information and support for parents. The school has a pragmatic approach to being supportive by establishing a clothing bank for desperate families and providing a well-organized, school-wide free breakfast for students. The guidance counselor coordinates communication with doctors, caseworkers and therapists, where there is a need to help vulnerable families. In addition, the school has responded positively to the significant influx of refugee Burmese students through its ‘newcomer’ programs. However, the impact of the English as a second language program is very variable because of limited resources and staff training.

The permanent presence of a nurse on site enables the school to deal with health issues immediately. She supports valuable activities to promote an awareness of health issues and raises students’ self-esteem to enable them to cope with personal challenges. However, the school does not provide a structured program of workshops to help parents to develop their own parenting skills, or to understand the work of the school.

1.3: Close Student- Adult Relationships

The students’ relationships with mentors/teachers are fair.

The school promotes consistent and relevant communication through newsletters and e-mails. It translates newsletters and details about parent-teacher conferences into community languages. The school website contains regular information about student grades and homework assignments, which enables access for parents with computers. Parents appreciate the care and dedication of staff. For example, teachers do recess duty to be with students in the more informal and social settings of the school. Specific strengths are the pre-school and kindergarten provision, tutoring and the after-school club. However, an issue that concerns parents is the low expectations for student achievement across the school. A recently formed parents’ association is looking to generate more support from the parent body in order to help in the drive to improve standards at the school. Although systems are in place for parents to share details about their child’s interests and specific needs, not all parents are sufficiently engaged in their children’s education. The school continues to make efforts to learn about the changing cultural diversity and the backgrounds of its community through the provision of Burmese interpreters at school events. Parents have limited involvement in formulation of the school improvement plan.

Criterion 2: Readiness to Teach

This area of the school's work is fair.

2.1: Shared Responsibility for Achievement

The school's organizational structure is fair.

The principal has introduced rigorous accountability for student achievement. Staff handbooks and faculty meetings articulate the expectations about classroom environments and instruction. These structures and accountability procedures are providing coherence to the schools' work. The principal has used instructional coaches to facilitate informal evaluations. Feedback mechanisms relating to lessons provide useful pointers as to how teaching could improve. A culture of shared leadership is promoting a focused commitment to improving student achievement. This commitment reflects in the staffs' willingness to be active members of multiple committees ranging from school improvement, curriculum development and strategizing intervention for students. Collaboration within and across grade levels provides a forum for identifying challenging goals for students. Teacher mentors are instrumental in promoting the principals' vision for the school as well as providing professional guidance. They support new staff members. Peer observations are encouraged but the constraints of scheduling and full-time teaching have restricted this as a regular occurrence.

The school corporation has not been sufficiently proactive in clarifying its expectations about accountability for improving student performance. The absence of a strategic plan for schools of this nature means there is little coherence in the identification of roles and shared responsibilities in improving standards. It bases many decisions on the short-term need for re-allocation of resources, which is having a negative impact upon continuity and undermines the notion of shared accountability.

2.2: Personalization of Instruction

The use of assessment data to personalize instruction is fair.

The procedures for collecting and analyzing student performance and personal data are in place. The school has a procedure for tracking students' progress over time. It analyzes summative data to identify underachievement. This enables the school to benchmark students, within the respective grades, and provide focused intervention. In addition, it displays the achievement of each student in language arts and math on data walls. The dissemination and use of assessment information on achievement is increasingly systematic and productive. The school uses diagnostic assessments such as DIBELS, m-CLASS math and Acuity to make instructional decisions. It systematically uses the extensive reading assessments from the 'Reading First Program' to determine individualized approaches to learning. Benchmarking data for the significant increase in the numbers of English language learners is currently not as detailed and comprehensive. In a broader context, staff routinely share the outcomes of multiple assessments in grade level meetings. They use this evidence to group students according to their specific needs and provide a context for improving student learning. In this way, teachers are also adjusting their instruction to address the difficulties encountered by students.

The quality of teaching is variable and has not been helped by numerous staff changes. There is evidence of some good practice and a general commitment to improve instruction. However, faculty do not interpret consistently the school's high expectations of student achievement. In all classes, teachers indicate clear lesson objectives and the activities to be undertaken. As a result, most students know what teachers expect them to learn. Some self-assessment is taking place but teachers do not routinely reinforce it so that all students know their achievement levels in English language arts and math with a degree of certainty. Teachers use rubrics to achieve consistency in evaluating student work but they are not displayed in classrooms. This would provide a clearer understanding of performance criteria, particularly for students in the older grades.

The school has modified its use of instructional time to provide specified blocks for reading, math and English language arts. It also allocates a daily period to writing in all grades from kindergarten through to grade 5. These organizational decisions provide a consistent focus on improving achievement in the

core subjects. The school uses its technology resources successfully to accommodate flexible learning arrangements for special education students. The core program of learning for students has greater coherence but the impact does not yet reflect in significantly improved performance against State standards.

2.3: Professional Teaching Culture

The professional culture within the school is acceptable.

The collaboration between staff is a strong feature of the school. There are frequently scheduled opportunities for staff to do so, particularly within grades. The nature of these meetings shows a strong commitment to improving instruction and meeting the needs of students. The two instructional coaches, in English and math respectively, effectively promote strategies for improving instruction utilizing such initiatives as the 'Reading First Program' and problem-solving activities in math. The faculty are encouraged to share good practice through inter-class visitations, although the school schedule imposes some constraints on this being an extensive feature.

The school does not have an assistant principal in post so the onus of responsibility for informal observations has predominantly rested with the principal. She frequently visits classes but walk-throughs tend to be far too light touch. There are well-planned and rigorous formal evaluations. The two instructional coaches routinely keep the principal informed about the quality of current practice in classrooms. This process is productive in raising potential areas for professional development such as improving student engagement in the group work activities.

There is a strong alignment between professional development and curriculum planning. The regular professional development sessions that take place after school for the whole faculty are well organized. An observed session on developing students writing competencies gave teachers helpful insights to improve how they introduced and subsequently developed activities. The outcome from training is creating a greater consistency of practice within the school and promoting better student learning. The professional culture within has changed as staff are motivated, challenged and held accountable for student outcomes.

Criterion 3: Readiness to Act

This area of the school's work is fair overall.

3.1: Resource Authority

The principal's freedom in making decisions is poor.

The principal has limited authority to determine the staffing complement as the school has to submit job requisitions to the central office and the administrative cabinet make appointments. The conditions of the East Allen County Schools contracts for teachers have a constraining effect upon the school's flexibility to hire and retain members of staff. The School Corporation has imposed staffing decisions on the school in relation to allocating personnel to specific programs. This has resulted in a lack of continuity of staff and hindered the school's improvement program. In addition, the laxity in the Corporation's procedures to fill the assistant principal post urgently has put a high level of pressure upon the principal in sustaining the administration of the school.

The principal uses staff competences strategically, following the assignment of teachers to the building. Considered allocations of funding improvements such as those for Reading First complement her decisions. However, financial constraints imposed by the Corporation leave very little scope for the principal to use financial inducements to reward the high performance of the staff. The principal is reliant on the professional commitment and willingness of the staff to go that 'extra mile' to sustain the integrity of instructional programs within the school.

The School Corporation does not have a clearly articulated strategy to resource the school according to its needs. Consequently, it has not made appropriate staffing and resources available to meet the

unique needs of this school. For example, the current bonus for retaining staff is inadequate. The Corporation do not review the school's standards or its own procedures routinely to check the serious issue of staff mobility or evaluate its adverse impact upon student achievement.

3.2: Resource Ingenuity

The principal's resourcefulness and ingenuity is fair.

The school has established positive partnerships with its community. Productive links with universities enable student teachers to visit the school and discuss ideas to promote student achievement. The work with external agencies such as United Way has a direct impact upon student perceptions and aspirations. The group are responsible for the promotion of such programs as 'Real Men Read' and 'Learn United', which is motivating more students to read. The school has actively sought the literary resources such as dictionaries and books, supportively provided by the Optimist and Rotary clubs.

The school gauges opinion about the school from surveys, which it regularly gives to its community. The responses are predominantly positive with parents valuing the caring and nurturing environment created at the school. Parents identify communication as being helpful and informative and appreciate the dedication of teachers towards their work with their children. Likewise, students like the 'family atmosphere' in the school. The school has been responsive to parental concerns about expectations for student achievement. For example, this led to an increase of time scheduled for language arts, math and writing in all grades. In addition, the school placed an emphasis on the reduction in student movement between classes to increase instructional time. It also provides opportunities for parents to be involved in the review of the school improvement plan. However, the School Corporation does not have a clear strategy for promoting partnerships with the business community in order to attract additional resources and funding.

3.3: Agility in the Face of Turbulence

The principal's inventiveness and flexibility during conflicts and challenges is fair.

The principal has a clear understanding of the issues facing the school. She is embedding an accountability culture underpinned by robust organizational procedures and routines to achieve consistency in practice. A focused approach to change reflects in the way in which the school addresses issues such as raising teachers' expectations of English language learners or students with high ability. Staff members are responding positively to the increased use of data to identify students who are underachieving. However, not all staff use data consistently, to differentiate instruction. Equally, the generic goals identified in the school improvement plan are not reviewed with sufficient regularity, and do not have interim benchmarks to evaluate ongoing progress towards their successful completion.

The principal is committed to distributed leadership and in consequence, the senior leadership team has representation from across the grades as well as administration. This is enabling these key faculty members to develop skills to initiate and implement change.

The School Corporation has not provided sufficient direction or resources, either personnel or funding, to support the school's improvement program or to raise standards.

Summary of Findings

Village Elementary School

October 20, 2009

SCHOOL RATING

		Findings			
		1-Unacceptable <i>No evidence</i>	2-Poor <i>Minimal evidence</i>	3-Fair <i>Present, though limited and/or inconsistent</i>	4-Acceptable <i>Routine and consistent</i>
1 Readiness to Learn				X	
1.1: Safety, Discipline, and Engagement				X	
<i>Is the school culture environment safe and conducive to learning?</i>					
1.1a	Students are effectively encouraged to behave well, relate well to others and to have positive attitudes toward learning.			X	
1.1b	Classrooms and hallways provide an attractive and stimulating environment that fosters high academic and personal expectations.			X	
1.1c	School routines and rules are implemented consistently and communicated clearly to students, parents and staff.				X
1.1d	The school has effective measures for promoting good attendance and eliminating truancy and tardiness.				X
<i>Do students feel secure and inspired to learn?</i>					
1.1e	A robust core program ensures that students develop key learning and personal skills.		X		
1.1f	The school provides a well-rounded curriculum and enrichment activities add interest and relevance.			X	
1.1g	Career education and personal goal setting are used to raise student aspirations and motivation.			X	
1.2: Action Against Adversity				X	
<i>Does the school directly address students' poverty-driven deficits?</i>					
1.2a	The school knows and understands the personal as well as academic needs of the students in order to address the effects of students' poverty head-on.			X	
1.2b	The school addresses the needs of families so that they can better support student learning.			X	
1.2c	The school develops students' skills, behaviors and values that enable them to effectively advocate for themselves.			X	
1.3: Close Student-Adult Relationships				X	
<i>Do students have positive and enduring mentor/ teacher relationships?</i>					
1.3a	The school works with parents to build positive relationships and to engage them as partners in their children's learning.		X		
1.3b	The school is successful in implementing a variety of strategies specifically designed to promote a sense of connection between students and adults.				X

SCHOOL RATING

		Findings			
		1-Unacceptable No evidence	2-Poor Minimal evidence	3-Fair Present, though limited and/or inconsistent	4-Acceptable Routine and consistent
2 Readiness to Teach				X	
2.1: Shared Responsibility for Achievement				X	
<i>Does the school have a strong organizational culture, characterized by trust, respect and mutual responsibility?</i>					
2.1a	The principal ensures that there is a strong accountability for student achievement throughout the school.			X	
2.1b	The staff feel deep accountability and a missionary zeal for student achievement.			X	
2.1c	A shared commitment to a vision of the school includes challenging goals for all students.			X	
2.1d	The school corporation drives the accountability agenda.	X			
2.2: Personalization of Instruction				X	
<i>Are diagnostic assessments used frequently and accurately to inform instructional decisions and promote student learning?</i>					
2.2a	The school utilizes a coherent system to provide detailed tracking and analysis of assessment results.				X
2.2b	Teachers use data gathered from multiple assessments to plan instruction and activities that match the learning needs of students.			X	
2.2c	Teachers give feedback to students and involve them in the assessment of their work and in the setting of achievement goals.			X	
2.2d	The schedule is used flexibly to ensure that individual student needs are met effectively.			X	
2.2e	The overall impact of planning, instruction and assessment leads to effective student learning.			X	
2.3: Professional Teaching Culture					X
<i>Does the professional culture promote faculty and staff participation, collaboration and training to enhance student learning?</i>					
2.3a	The faculty works together, incessantly and naturally to help each other improve their practice.				X
2.3b	The principal uses classroom observation and the analysis of learning outcomes to improve teaching and learning.				X
2.3c	Professional development is job-embedded and directly linked to changing instructional practice in order to improve student achievement.				X

SCHOOL RATING

		Findings			
		1-Unacceptable <i>No evidence</i>	2-Poor <i>Minimal evidence</i>	3-Fair <i>Present, though limited and/or inconsistent</i>	4-Acceptable <i>Routine and consistent</i>
3 Readiness to Act				X	
3.1: Resource Authority				X	
<i>Does the principal have the freedom to make streamlined, mission-driven decisions regarding people, time, money and program?</i>					
3.1a	The principal has the authority to select and assign staff to positions in the school without regard to seniority.		X		
3.1b	The school has developed adequate human resource systems.				X
3.1c	The principal has the authority to implement controversial yet innovative practices.		X		
3.1d	The school corporation enables the principal to have the freedom to make decisions.	X			
3.1e	The school corporation directs resources, including staffing, to schools differentiated on the basis of need.	X			
3.2: Resource Ingenuity				X	
<i>Is the principal adept at securing additional resources and leveraging partner relationships?</i>					
3.2a	External partnerships have been strategically developed to engender academic improvement.			X	
3.2b	The community is encouraged to participate in the decision making and improvement work of the school.			X	
3.2c	The principal promotes resourcefulness and ingenuity in order to meet student needs.			X	
3.2d	The school corporation has district-wide structures and strategies to maximize external resources.	X			
3.3: Agility in the Face of Turbulence				X	
<i>Is the principal flexible and inventive in responding to conflicts and challenges?</i>					
3.3a	The principal has the capacity to ensure school improvement.				X
3.3b	The principal provides competent stewardship and oversight of the school.				X
3.3c	Decisions are made and plans are developed on the basis of rigorous monitoring and evaluation.			X	
3.3d	Key faculty members have the capacity to support the work that is needed.			X	
3.3e	The principal reshapes and incorporates local projects and special initiatives to meet students' needs.			X	
3.3f	The school corporation has the capacity to drive school improvement initiatives.		X		
3.3g	The school corporation supports and enables flexibility and inventiveness within the school.		X		

RATING DESCRIPTION

Using the School Quality Rubric, the school is rated on a 1-4 scale in each of the three domains. The scale is described below:

1	Red = Unacceptable	The school shows no attempt to meet the standard.
2	Orange = Poor	The school has made minimal progress towards the standard.
3	Yellow = Fair	The school is making progress towards the standard.
4	Green = Acceptable	The school meets the standard.

The goal is that the school receive a rating of 4 (GREEN) for the school to be considered as performing that element to an acceptable level. The 4 rating indicates the school meets the standard.